

The Rising Influence of Segmented and Fractionalized Communities in Israel

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Abstract

This thesis describes the segmented and fractionalized communities in Israel gaining power and influence, particularly through the political lens, with a focus on the Ultra-Orthodox and how Ultra-Orthodox communities have begun to move Israel politically to the right (i.e. more conservative). The paper highlights the Mizrahi, Russian, and Ultra-Orthodox communities, describing their development, their key points of differentiation, and overlaps between these groups. The Ultra-Orthodox case study is the major focus of this analysis, as the Ultra-Orthodox are arguably the most influential of historically discriminated Israeli communities. After this discussion, the paper describes Israeli Arabs as a segmented and fractionalized community that has not gained power as have other communities and describes the reasons behind this disparity. The thesis concludes with the affect the rising power and influence of the Mizrahim, the Russians, and the Ultra-Orthodox will have on Israeli demographics, the Israeli economy, and Israel's approach to the peace process for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. The unchanging position of Israeli Arabs is also considered as a factor in these predictions.

This paper argues that understanding the newly influential Mizrahi, Russian, and Ultra-Orthodox communities is imperative to understanding Israeli society as a whole, as well as properly framing Israel's approach to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Introduction

Israel became a country in 1948 and since that time, Israeli society has changed significantly. While Israeli society has changed, conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis has continued. Wars have become a regular occurrence in the region and constant changes in the makeup of the Israeli population cause regular changes in public norms and power dynamics. Israel is a complex society made up of a plethora of unique communities, each with its own ideology and platform of issues. Many of these groups have had to work together and are connected, if nothing else, through their involvement with the Israeli government and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Overwhelmingly, the Israeli public subscribes at some level to a religious group, with the largest religious groups being Judaism and Islam. Within each of these religions are multiple denominations that co-exist with secular groups. Each of these has its own opinions which influence its interactions with other religious groups and with the government. As such, group cohesion may at times come into question.

As Israeli society develops, groups which have traditionally been limited either in numbers or economic or political power are seeing changes in their level of acceptance and the power they are beginning to yield in the public sphere. Some of these communities have been geographically isolated while others have been ideologically isolated or discriminated against. Such a reality provides unique conditions for a sociological approach to the study of Israeli population groups and their affect on the country and its international relationships (through government involvement and affect on the peace process) in terms of international politics, security, and foreign relations.

Minorities have immigrated to Israel since its creation. Immigrant groups have subsequently obtained better societal positions, but may not have been fully integrated, accepted, or allowed to achieve significant levels of influence on Israeli society at the time of entrance. This paper studies these segmented and fractionalized communities in Israel and how they are gaining power and influence. Depending on the publication source and year, different data are offered on populations within Israel.

To view data directly from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, look at Appendix 1 for data on country of origin for Israeli Jews and Appendix 2 to understand Israeli immigration patterns. The paper seeks to answer the question of the extent to which these communities are achieving such an improved position and how this affects Israel's future and the future of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The major Israeli marginalized groups gaining power are the Mizrahim, the Russians, and the Ultra-Orthodox. Each of these groups is discussed in terms of its historical marginalization, group similarities and overlaps, and how each community is gaining power in society, especially in the realm of politics. Particular focus is placed on the Ultra-Orthodox and how Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities have begun to move Israel politically to the right. After this discussion, Israeli Arabs are discussed as a segmented and fractionalized community that has not gained power in contemporary society and the conditions that have allowed for this exception to continue.

Historical conditions have shaped the segmented and fractionalized communities used as examples and have allowed these communities to reach their current position and begin to gain power, almost simultaneously. Most of the Israeli Mizrahim immigrated to Israel from Muslim countries where they were second class citizens, if they were recognized with legal rights at all. In Israel, they were no longer second class, but were still discriminated against. This discrimination is beginning to end. Russians moved to Israel around the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and their immigration continued until approximately 1.1 million Russians had immigrated to Israel and caused a significant change (and population increase) in Israeli society.¹ The Ultra-Orthodox have also been discriminated against in Israel and are viewed as "different" by much of the society. Nevertheless, the Ultra-Orthodox are becoming more important to success in Israeli politics and community development. Israeli Arabs enjoy more freedoms and, in many ways, better life conditions than Arabs in other countries. Nevertheless, of the segmented and fractionalized communities discussed, Israeli Arabs remain the least

¹ Immigration since 1948. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. <http://www.Jewishvirtuallibrary.org> (accessed February 14, 2010).

integrated and least powerful – and this does not seem to be changing. Through a study of the reasons Israeli Arabs have not achieved improved societal access, one may better understand how other communities have been successful. It may also be noted that the Israeli Christian community is not included in the list of comparable communities. Israeli Christians, at only 2% of the population, while an important part of Israeli society, are not significant enough of a political/societal influence when defined solely on the basis of religion, when compared to these other groups.²

The growing influence of the Mizrahi, Russian, and Ultra-Orthodox communities will surely have an influence on Israel now and well into the future as their power continues to grow. In the political sphere, the most well publicized influence will be in relation to the Israel-Palestinian Conflict peace process. As more conservative communities gain political power, Israel will be less generous in the concessions it makes as part of the peace process and less willing to accept terms of a peace accord that it finds to be less than favorable. Each of these historically segmented and fractionalized communities is becoming main stream and growing in numbers. This has significant affects on the Israeli economy and on Israeli demographics, an important focus of the Jewish state that has worried about Arab birth rates surpassing Jewish birth rates and changing the makeup of the Israeli democracy.

² Eldar, Yishai. Focus on Israel - The Christian Communities of Israel. Ministry of Foreign Affairs - The State of Israel. <http://www.mfa.gov.il> (accessed February 14, 2010).

Definitions

In the study of Israel and contemporary society, much of the terminology has multiple meaning. The following words and ideas are defined below, in no particular order, either by description of their function or by reputable dictionaries in order to provide their context in this paper.

Segmented

Segmented communities are those communities which are divided or partitioned and separated “by the creation of a boundary that divides or keeps apart” these communities from others.³ Such a boundary can be visible or invisible, self-imposed or imposed by society.

Fractionalized

Fractionalized communities have been “separate[d] into distinct parts or fractions” in such a way as people may become “scattered” and separated – perhaps by difference.⁴ As communities become fractionalized, they may complement one another or they may conflict with one another as members interact.

Marginalized

This thesis discusses groups/communities that have historically been “render[ed] or treat[ed] as marginal; remove[d] from the centre or mainstream; force[d] (an individual, minority group, etc.) to the periphery of a dominant social group” and related to in a manner meant “to belittle, depreciate, discount, or dismiss” their importance to the country as a whole.⁵ As with all countries whose makeup transforms as they develop, this relationship is changing.

³ Segmentation - WordNet search 3.0. Princeton University. <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu> (accessed February 12, 2010).

⁴ Oxford English Dictionary fractionalize, v. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed February 12, 2010).

⁵ Oxford English Dictionary marginalize, v. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed March 24, 2010).

Influence

A region or territory (for purposes of this thesis – primarily areas of government or community) within which a particular group claims, or is admitted, to have a special interest for group, social, political, and/or economic purposes.⁶

Perspective(s)

A perspective is “the relationship of aspects of a subject to each other and to a whole; subjective evaluation of relative significance, a point of view; the ability to perceive things in their actual interrelations or comparative importance.”⁷ To understand the perspective of each group discussed herein is paramount to understanding their relationships with other segmented and fractionalized communities and with Israeli society as a whole.

Religion

A religion is an organized group of people with common beliefs. Israel is perhaps the religious capital of the world, with historical and religious significance for the world’s major religions. “In reference to religious group/position that is disagreed with by others in the same society: A system of religious or spiritual beliefs, especially an informal and transient belief system regarded by others as misguided, unorthodox, extremist, or false.”⁸ Religious misunderstanding and disagreement are key issues in the discussion of this thesis.

Sephardim and Mizrahim

Sephardim are Jews and their descendants from Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East. Mizrahim are often grouped within Sephardim. Mizrahi literally means “Eastern”. It is a term

⁶ Oxford English Dictionary sphere, n. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed November 20, 2009).

⁷ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Perspective | definitions of perspective at dictionary.com. Houghton Mifflin Company on Dictionary.com. <http://dictionary.reference.com> (accessed November 20, 2009).

⁸ Cult [religious group] definition - dictionary - MSN Encarta. Encarta World English Dictionary. <http://encarta.msn.com> (accessed November 20, 2009).

used to describe Jews and their descendants from North Africa and the Middle East, including Jews who live(d) in Muslim countries. The Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel is almost always Mizrahi. Because of this overlap, the terms Sephardi and Mizrahi may be used interchangeably in this paper.⁹ In Israel, Mizrahi is the more commonly used term to describe this group. For religious purposes, Sephardi is the most accurate descriptor. Outside of Israel, Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews are typically grouped under the Sephardi label.

Ashkenazim

Ashkenazim are Jews from Central and Eastern Europe and their descendants.¹⁰ Ashkenazi Jews were the primary developers of the State of Israel and have traditionally been better off than Mizrahim/Sephardim, perhaps due to greater levels of assimilation and/or acceptance by the communities and countries in which they live(d).

Russian

Russians are those who are native to or inhabit Russia, people of Russian descent, or “native[s] or inhabitant[s] of the former Soviet Union”.¹¹ This group (including descendants) is included because of the mass immigration of 1.1 million Russians to Israel between 1989 and 2000.¹²

Ultra-Orthodox

The term Ultra-Orthodox is used interchangeably with Haredi and refers to “Orthodox Jewish groups or communities (including the Hasidim) which adhere strictly to the traditional form of Jewish law and rejection of modern secular culture, and many of which do not recognize the modern state of

⁹ Khazoom, Loolwa. Jews of the Middle East. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. <http://www.Jewishvirtuallibrary.org> (accessed February 14, 2010).

¹⁰ Oxford English Dictionary Ashkenazim, n. pl. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed March 28, 2010).

¹¹ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Russian | definition of russian at dictionary.com. Houghton Mifflin Company on Dictionary.com. <http://dictionary.reference.com> (accessed February 14, 2010).

¹² Immigration.

Israel as a spiritual authority”.¹³ While the Ultra-Orthodox does include the Hasidim, they are not one in the same. The Ultra-Orthodox also includes those who are strict religious adherents, but who do not follow a human leader. This includes the Mitnagdim or “opponents” who developed as an alternative to the Hasidim.

Peace Process

“A series of initiatives, talks, etc., designed to bring about a negotiated settlement between warring or disputing parties.”¹⁴ For purposes of this paper, the peace process refers to the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, stated as such to focus on those groups who live within the disputed geographic boundary of the State of Israel.

¹³ Oxford English Dictionary haredi, a. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed February 14, 2010).

¹⁴ Oxford English Dictionary peace, n. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com> (accessed November 20, 2009).

Literature Review

This thesis topic falls into a web of literature related both to internal Israeli affairs and to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Due to the historical importance of Israel to people worldwide and the contemporary controversial nature of much of the region's activities, Israel is a well studied country and its people are frequently written about. Indeed a search on Amazon.com of the later term reveals 6,357 book results (as of February 2010). While it is not feasible to adequately assess all of these books, my research has begun to develop a representation of major topics of study within this field. In order to determine where my topic fits into this research, it is necessary to do at least basic research into Jewish relations in Israel (intragroup and intergroup), Muslim relations in Israel (intragroup and intergroup), political development in the Israeli government and society, a basic history of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Israeli demographics and contemporary attempts for peace.

The overwhelming focus of both popular writings and academic writings is the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and related topics and issues, including history, contemporary developments, and projections for the future. Many groups are currently working to develop ties between Jewish Israelis and Muslim Palestinians in an effort to further the peace process. This work has been done primarily by politically left groups on both sides, but has not had as much of a focus on Jewish and Muslim Israelis. Such research seems to not focus on the relations between religious groups and the government as much as it does the peace process and "getting along". As such, it ignores group power dynamics beyond "Jewish" and "Arab" or "Palestinian".

Interestingly, it has been difficult to find basic books that describe the Israeli political process. Nevertheless, literature does exist on how the Israeli government works and notably, the importance placed on Supreme Court decisions and the respect held for the Supreme Court even in the midst of unstable governments. Data has been collected on the involvement of various Jewish religious groups in

the political process as well as Arab (assumedly Muslim) parties. Research shows how these groups are involved in the development of government and their roles in determining laws and policies.

A plethora of research exists on the history of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, often referred to under a host of other terms. This has shown the development of relations between Israeli and Palestinian groups, and to a lesser extent the roles of Jewish and Muslim groups in Israel. Plenty of scholars offer an abundance of suggestions for the future. None of the research found addresses this completely from the perspective of gaining power among the communities, as focused on in this paper.

Each of the segmented and fractionalized groups discussed herein is the subject of its own research, but little is written that compares all of them. Mizrahi Jews are frequently written about in terms of the group's origins in primarily Muslim countries, their economic condition, and discrimination in Israeli society. Only the most recent literature has begun to discuss their new acceptance and improved position. Most of the literature about Russians in Israel involves the conditions of the mass immigration from the Soviet Union/Russia, the economic condition of the Russian community, and the religious makeup of its membership. Only limited writing has been done on the group gaining power throughout the country, beyond the categories previously listed. The Ultra-Orthodox are well documented. Writings discuss Ultra-Orthodox "uniqueness" in relation to Israeli society as a whole and Jews around the world. The Ultra-Orthodox are discussed in relation to their political parties, the military, education, family size, protesting government and business decisions, and their poor economic condition. Of these three groups, the Ultra-Orthodox have the most written about them gaining power, but such writings primarily focus on power within individual national governments and not as a group whose power has been increasing holistically and over time. Israeli Arabs are often described as ignored by Israeli society and with limited government involvement and influence. This is well documented as is the Israeli Arab perception of the peace process.

Major Israeli Marginalized Groups Gaining Power

Modern Israel was founded primarily by Eastern and Central European Jews as a result of the Zionist Movement and growing international support for a national home for Jews. Israel is an immigrant society. As the country has grown over the past 60+ years, it has seen an influx of immigrants from around the world, perhaps more quickly and from more nations than any other country in modern history. During Israel's short life, it has at various times had economic issues that affected its ability to effectively integrate large groups of new citizens. As such, Israel created development towns that could both provide the infrastructure to support new immigrants and serve to develop the country's resources. These new immigrants included more than one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union and hundreds of thousands from Arab countries around the Middle East and Mediterranean. Further, as communities of citizens formed new cities and neighborhoods, some designed their neighborhoods to facilitate their religious needs. These religious neighborhoods, and even entire cities, have appeared throughout Israel. Unfortunately, forced and self-imposed segregation both have the affect of producing discrimination.

Understanding the role of social identity and minority interest in Israel is imperative to understanding the Israeli political system. Israel is governed by these identity politics to such an extent that political parties, and subsequently power and influence at the national level, are often primarily based upon group affinity. Israeli political power and societal influence began with the Ashkenazi Jews who founded the country. As immigration increased, the new citizens were segmented into areas of the country that were not as developed and thus, their ability to influence the progress (political, etc.) of the country was significantly limited. Almost all immigrant groups have come from countries in which their minority status precluded their ability to be citizens or significantly limited their access to social rights. In Israel, while they may have still been discriminated against, their rights were not systemically impeded. With these groups now gaining acceptance by society as a whole, their power and influence

have grown significantly in the last decade. The process of gaining significant access has taken longer for the Mizrahim than the Russians, while the Ultra-Orthodox have successfully moved beyond their traditional foot hold in national politics and have begun to have real and lasting involvement in national decision making processes.

The Mizrahim

The Mizrahim are made up of Jews from North Africa and Asia, primarily in Arab/Muslim countries. Prior to moving to Israel, most of these Jews lived as second class citizens, if they were given citizenship rights at all. Their lives consisted of discrimination and increasing hostility leading up to Israel's 1948 declaration of independence. After Israel declared independence and won its War of Independence, the Jews in Arab countries lost even more rights and became targets for retribution. Between 1948 and the 1960s, "870,000 Mizrahi Jews fled Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Iran, and Afghanistan" with more than 600,000 settling in Israel.¹⁵ Many of these Mizrahi Jews resemble Arabs, had cultural tendencies similar to those of Arabs, and have religious traditions different from the dominant Ashkenazi Jews in Israel. Israel was not developed enough to effectively integrate all of the new immigrants. As such, the Mizrahi Jews were often sent to camps and then on to development towns that scattered the periphery of the country. Many of these towns still exist today.

Israel was interested in the process of "state building" and utilized the new immigrants to develop areas of the country in which the Ashkenazim were either not settling or in which the Ashkenazim were disinterested. While this could have been positive for the Mizrahim, it often ended up with the immigrants being isolated from society as a whole. Infrastructure was limited in these areas and communication and transportation were lacking. As a result, the Mizrahim were unable to effectively integrate with society. This problem was worsened by "high levels of poverty and welfare

¹⁵ Rosenthal, Donna. *The Israelis: Ordinary People in an Extraordinary Land*. New York: Free Press, 2008. 121.

dependency” as well as a lack of quality education.¹⁶ The Israeli policy of integrating immigrants from a plethora of backgrounds into a new peoplehood, was not a practice of “absorption through acceptance’ but rather ‘absorption through rejection’” of past traditions, customs, etc. Indeed David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister, was quoted in 1951 saying that “we [Israel] do not want to freeze the Yemenite way of life. Rather, we want to adapt it to the Israeli way of life, to Israeli liberty, to Israeli equality, to Israeli heroism, to Israeli culture and society... We want to erase unnecessary distinction between the Yemenite and the other Jews”.¹⁷ Noble as this ideal might have been, it had the affect of separating the Mizrahim, limiting their integration into society, and delaying their ability to move up the socio-political power/influence ladder.

Slowly, the Mizrahim have begun to gain new influence in Israeli society. One scholar claims that one can divide Israeli film representations of Mizrahim into three stages, writing that the first incorporates

Mizrahim into the fledgling Israeli nation by legitimizing them as Jews. The second is that, once legitimized, Mizrahim were made part of the national Jewish family through marriage. The third is that after becoming part of the [national] family, Mizrahi men were then put into positions of control and, with the decline of Ashkenazi masculinity, eventually became more genuine or authentic representations of Israeliness.¹⁸

While this simplifies the progression of Mizrahi integration/power, it demonstrates that not only have Mizrahim had to work to become part of society as a whole, but as Israeli society changed as a whole, it has come to accept Mizrahim as Israelis.

When the Mizrahim arrived in Israel, they were an asset to the state, allowing the country to build its demographic Jewish base and secure borders against constant threats. The Mizrahim shared “preexisting identity, religion, peoplehood, and interdependence of fate” with the existing population.

¹⁶ Khazzoom, Aziza. Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s. *Social Forces* 84, no. 1 2005. 115-134.

¹⁷ Cohen-Almagor, Raphael. Cultural Pluralism and the Israeli Nation-Building Ideology. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27, no. 4 1995. 474 (accessed September 21, 2009).

¹⁸ Peleg, Yaron. From Black to White: Changing Images of Mizrahim in Israeli Cinema. *Israel Studies* 13, no. 2 2008. 122-145.

They were welcomed to Israel for this. Indeed, “their sheer numbers, which equaled the veteran population, should have empowered them appreciably in a small democratic state such as Israel,” providing impetus for progress in the growing nation. Unfortunately for the Mizrahim though, they arrived in their new home without material capital and with low human capital” as they had either been poor or forced to leave their belongings when immigrating.¹⁹ While this significantly impeded their economic success and political influence, subsequent generations of Mizrahim are reversing this trend.

While progress did not happen quickly for the Mizrahim, for some upwardly mobile first and second generation Mizrahi immigrants, national prominence has become a reality, specifically in the military and now in politics, including head of the Air Force Dan Halutz, several Chiefs of Staff for the military, several Defense Ministers, the head of the Labor Party, Benjamin Ben-Elizar, and Moshe Katsav as Israel’s President.²⁰ Most of these major developments have occurred since 2000. Mizrahim have been less educated and concentrated in lower paying and lower skill jobs than their Ashkenazi counterparts. It has taken time to overcome these obstacles, but “third-generation Israelis are becoming an important group” as they improve on their position relative to their parents and their grandparents. Indeed, “third generation Israelis are more similar to the [traditional positions of the] Ashkenazi than to the Mizrahi, in terms of educational attainment, occupational attainment, and cultural preferences”.²¹ As the distinguishing (and limiting) features between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim fall to the way side, the Mizrahim are being set up for significant status improvements.

Mizrahim now constitute an equal number of political and military elites as Ashkenazim.²² The democratic influence they should have had as new immigrants has finally begun to take shape. Many Mizrahim are more religious than their Ashkenazi counterparts and in Israeli politics, religion is one of

¹⁹ Smooha, Sammy. The Mass Immigrations to Israel: A Comparison of the Failure of the Mizrahi Immigrants of the 1950s with the Success of the Russian Immigrants of the 1990s. *Journal of Israeli History* 27, no. 1 (2008). 1-27.

²⁰ Rosenthal 127.

²¹ Katz-Gerro, Tally, Sharon Raz, and Meir Yaish. How do Class, Status, Ethnicity, and Religiosity Shape Cultural Omnivorousness in Israel? *Journal of Cultural Economics* 33, no. 1 (2009). 3.

²² Smooha 10.

the largest factors in party support. The Sephardi Torah Observant party (SHAS) was formed in the 1980s as a “Sephardi religious alternative to the Ashkenazi-dominated [National Religious Party] NRP”. As Mizrahi religious Jews left the NRP to join SHAS, “NRP’s share of the Israeli vote fell from 10 percent in 1969 to 5 percent in 1992”.²³ More importantly, Shas has won 11 Knesset seats in the February 2009 elections and 12 Knesset seats in the March 2006 election and has been invited to join the ruling coalition governments.²⁴ The conservative nature of many of the Mizrahim has allowed them to take the position of the base of right-wing parties.

Israeli films now feature characters whose Mizrahi identity is “ambiguous,” indicative of a more “integrated society”.²⁵ At the present time, major cleavages between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim have largely disappeared. Indeed, the Mizrahim have “reinforced national resilience by strengthening Jewish demography, settlement, economy, and military” in Israel.²⁶ They have contributed to Israeli food, culture, and entertainment. The rising influence of the Mizrahim is on a path that will replace their historical Mizrahi discrimination with political and social influence respective of their demographic role.

The Russians/Soviet Immigrants and Their Descendants

Twenty percent of Israelis speak Russian. After the “largest tidal wave[s] of immigrants in Israeli history [and] one of the largest in the history of the world,” it is impossible to consider Israel without one fifth of its population.²⁷ After the loosening of travel restrictions and the subsequent breakup of the Soviet Union, almost one million people moved to Israel. Unlike their Mizrahi counterparts, the conditions in Israel upon arrival of the Russian immigrants were significantly better. Israeli society was more advanced and economically stable. The country had become more democratic and more culturally

²³ Sharkansky, Ira. *Policy Making in Israel: Routines for Simple Problems and Coping with the Complex*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

²⁴ Hazan, Reuven Y. and Abraham Diskin. The Parliamentary Election in Israel, February 2009. *Electoral Studies* 28, no. 4 (12, 2009). 656.

²⁵ Peleg 139.

²⁶ Smooha 19.

²⁷ Rosenthal 138.

inclusive. The Israeli establishment was generally favorable to the high human capital the Russians brought, even in conjunction with the lackluster material wealth they were initially able to contribute to the country. Israel understood the ability of the Russian to strengthen “Israel’s Jewish population, national security, and economy”.²⁸

Israelis typically sought to develop a new type of person, the Zionist, secular, hard working Jew who could defend the country. The Russians did not meet this description. In fact, many of them are not even Jewish, but were able to get citizenship through the religion of extended family members and Israel’s Law of Return. While the Russians did not meet Israeli ideals, they had the benefit of being compared to many founders of the country who had similarly been of Russian descent, allowing the new immigrants to tap into an established network. As such, even though many Russian immigrants were initially placed into poor development towns, it was thought that they would be able to improve the economic position of these traditionally poor towns. Rather, the Russians quickly moved up and out, buying apartments that were significantly more expensive than their development town beginnings.²⁹ Unfortunately for the Russian immigrants, they were at other initial disadvantages upon arrival including language, culture, and economic position. While the Russians had high human capital that was favored by the Israeli society, they often could not pass competency tests in Hebrew. This resulted in Russian doctors, engineers, etc. working “in a kitchen or behind a counter” as opposed to their chosen occupation or being featured in museums like past Russian Israeli pioneers.³⁰ Indeed, at the peak of immigration, 40% of recent Russian immigrants were unemployed.³¹ Eventually though, the Russians began to move up the socioeconomic ladder, much more quickly than past immigrants, and enter the middle class en masse.

²⁸ Smooha 13.

²⁹ Ibid 15.

³⁰ Gershenson, Olga. Accented Memory: Russian Immigrants Reimagine the Israeli Past. *Journal of Israeli History* 28, no. 1, 2009. 22.

³¹ Rosenthal 145.

Russian immigrants faced initial skepticism over their ability to negotiate their strong Russian identity with Israeli (and Jewish) identity. Unlike past immigrants though, Russians were not forced to give up their old identity in the new country. Rather, Israeli society has developed Russian restaurants, community centers, media outlets, etc. that allow the Russian immigrants to express their heritage in an Israeli context. In a country where strong national identity is an important factor for acceptance and influence, the Russian immigrants have certainly been successful. On average (by age), 62.1% of 1990-2005 Russian immigrants consider themselves Israeli, 68% consider themselves Jewish, and 32.2% claim that they strongly feel Russian. The strong Israeli association increases further to 80.5% with younger Russian immigrants (ages 18-24), indicating strong national pride and association – a key indicator for future successes. This association has grown, demonstrated by the 38.3% of Russian immigrants who currently feel more Jewish than they did upon immigration and the 72% of immigrants who now feel more Israeli. 80-85% of Russians believe that they are “an integral part of Israeli society and of the country and its problems and take any vilification of the country as tantamount to personal vilification”.³² Russian immigration was in full force around the time of the first intifada and as many Russian Israelis were killed and mutilated in terrorist attacks, the Russians’ level of acceptance rose quickly.³³ Strong national connection (perhaps even more importantly than demographics) has allowed the Russians to gain political influence.

Since the 1990s, the Russian vote has been critical to success in national Israeli elections and coalition forming. The Russian voting bloc, on average, constitutes 20-22 seats in Israel’s 120 seat Knesset.³⁴ The high level of Russian mobilization is indicative of their lack of political access in the Soviet Union and their understanding of its importance in contemporary Israel. Their ability to effectively

³² Leshem, Elazar. Being an Israeli: Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel, Fifteen Years Later. *Journal of Israeli History* 27, no. 1, 2008. 34.

³³ Rosenthal 154.

³⁴ Freedman, Robert, ed. *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2009. 97.

utilize their political voice to shape the makeup of national governments and direction of national policy has drawn significant attention nationwide as politicians court the Russian immigrants, advancing their interests and further serving to improve their national position. With such a huge demographic, the voting trends of the Russian population have proven difficult to predict. The Russian vote has served as a swing vote in the last 20 years, definitively affecting election outcomes. Russian immigrants have traditionally voted either based on a desire for socioeconomic improvements or ideological views including national policy, security, and identity.³⁵ This is not surprising based on the quick rise of Russian involvement and social improvement, in light of commitment to “being Israeli” – including an inclination to perform “civic duties”, such as voting – another understanding strongest in the 18-24 age group.³⁶

Most primarily Russian ethnic based parties have failed. Instead, Russians favor assimilation and/or integration into national political parties that can be Russian influenced, but not solely Russian supported. The newest party that fits this “Russian party with an Israeli accent” theme is Yisrael Beiteinu, the right wing party led by Avigdor Liberman. Liberman, a Russian immigrant himself, has been said to be favored by many Russian immigrants due to his resemblance to Putin’s hard, in your face politics.³⁷ Russian immigrants have also held key positions in the Labor, Kadima, and Likud parties. As such, the influence of the Russians may vary across party by election – making their inclusion even more important to national political success.

Intergroup Connectedness and the Ultra-Orthodox

The Ultra-Orthodox overlap almost every group in Israeli society. A good deal of the Mizrahim are more religious than their Ashkenazi counterparts, an initial detriment to Mizrahi success in Israeli society. Many of the Russians are not religious (many are not even Jewish) and took advantage of easy citizenship in an effort to leave the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, their Jewish identity has grown with

³⁵ Ibid 98.

³⁶ Leshem 38.

³⁷ Ibid 103.

their Israeli identity and their understanding and affinity towards more religious Jews has grown. With the addition of about 2 million citizens, between the Mizrahi and Russians immigrants, Israel's Ultra-Orthodox population has grown considerably. Overlaps in group affiliation are common and contribute to the successes of each group individually. With the political influence of the Mizrahim and Russians growing, and group specific, targeted political parties being created, the Ultra-Orthodox have seen their demographic influence courted and targeted for support in this arena, among others – and the Ultra-Orthodox (if they support or are involved in the State of Israel) are a powerful and loud collective voice in Israel.

Israel is a democratic country, and in accordance with such principles, has free elections and multiparty competition. David Ben-Gurion claimed that the Jewish state could only truly exist as a country that finds meaning in “freedom of minorities, freedom of elections, freedom of thought, freedom of movement, freedom to resist the government within the law”.³⁸ While the country may not always succeed in fulfilling each of these goals, they are a source of tension and a cause for collective national improvement. These are the ideals that have been both strained and pressured by the Mizrahim, Russians, and Ultra-Orthodox as these groups have been repressed and as these groups have gained influential momentum. Inequality has been a “central issue of political mobilization and political consciousness”.³⁹ As power relations become more even, the country becomes more democratic. Unfortunately, as improved socioeconomic conditions create more political awareness and mobilization, they can also be a cause for conflict. In 2002 numbers, 38% of Israeli Jews were Ashkenazi while 40% were Mizrahi. Russian Jews who did not identify as one group or another (but have historically been considered Ashkenazi) make up the difference. Orthodox Jews made up 15-17% of 2002's Israeli Jewish

³⁸ Cohen-Almagor 461.

³⁹ Yiftachel, Oren. *Ethnocracy, Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. 93.

population, with about half of them Ultra-Orthodox.⁴⁰ With such overlaps, it is easy to understand how competing political parties have developed and conflict may arise as traditional power is challenged and power dynamics change. While some initial competition existed between the Mizrahim and the Russians, these disagreements are now miniscule, if in existence at all. Rather, religious disagreements and disputes occur on a regular basis – sometimes through discussion, sometimes through politics, and sometimes through violence.

In March 2010, public disagreement between Israel and the United States over Israeli policies towards building in East Jerusalem regularly made the news. The Israeli position though is not a simple amalgam of public policy, but rather is affected by the backgrounds of key players and political parties. Indeed, a Ha'aretz newspaper post stated that “a volatile alliance of ultra-secular Russian-born immigrants and Ultra-Orthodox sabras with roots in the Muslim world and the Mediterranean - are the effective veto both to the peace process as a whole and to a settlement freeze of any substance”.⁴¹ This author's opinion blames disagreement on the Mizrahim, the Russians, and the Ultra-Orthodox in one sentence. While some discrimination clearly lingers in this statement, it demonstrates the inextricable involvement in national policies that all three of these groups have now accomplished.

⁴⁰ Ibid 103.

⁴¹ Bursten, Bradley. Israel's Titanic Moment: Does Obama want Bibi's Head? *Ha'aretz*, March 16, 2010. <http://www.haaretz.com> (accessed March 27, 2010).

The Ultra-Orthodox

The Ultra-Orthodox are the most fervently observant followers of the Jewish religion. In Israel, they make up a mere 7.5 percent of the population (as of 2006)⁴², compared to the approximately 20% of the population composed of Russians and the approximately 45% of the Israeli population composed of Mizrahim and their descendents⁴³. Nevertheless, their influence is so great and their political impact so huge that the Ultra-Orthodox may be the defining factor in the future of Israel, to an even greater extent than they were in the founding of the country. Constituting 30% of Jerusalem, Israel's capital, the Ultra-Orthodox are a regular part of the lives of national politicians and are extremely visible in both support and protest activities. While some of the Ultra-Orthodox support the State and others are opposed to its existence (because Israel was reestablished by man, not G-d), Ultra-Orthodox political power can "make or break" government coalitions.⁴⁴

Different scholars and sociologists have alternative definitions for religious differences, but they tend to have some reflection of the secular, traditional, religious, Ultra-Orthodox scale. While they may be defined differently, many similarities exist between the religious and the Ultra-Orthodox and their political power may be grouped together in this section. The religious beliefs of these citizens lead them to favor right-wing conservative politics. In Israel, the political spectrum is primarily defined by national security and one's opinion of Arab-Israeli relations – specifically, actions willing to be taken to achieve peace, including one's willingness to give up land from a Greater Israel to achieve peace. Jewish religious texts state that Israel should be under the control of the Jewish people and whether or not the Ultra-Orthodox are also Zionists, most are unwilling to relinquish control of the land due to a fear of once again being kicked out of Israel. As the religious Israeli population grows, more are becoming

⁴² Sorek, Tamir and Alin M. Ceobanu. 2009. *Religiosity, National Identity and Legitimacy: Israel as an Extreme Case*. Vol. 43. 482.

⁴³ Chetrit, Sami Shalom. Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 4 (2000). 63.

⁴⁴ Rosenthal 186.

involved with the state and are participating in politics. The increase in voting is demonstrated by the development of more right wing parties and the rise of more right wing political leaders.

The Ultra-Orthodox are also called Haredim, Hebrew for “those who tremble before G-d”.⁴⁵ When the State of Israel was founded, it was meant to be a Jewish democracy, but incorporated many socialist principles. The founders thought it necessary to include the Haredim in discussions regarding the new country, even though the founders sought to form an idea of a “new Jew” who worked rather than prayed. These founders thought that religion would fade away in favor of socialism or at least socialist tendencies as they fit into the new democracy. Rather, “socialism, not religion, is now a historical memory in Israel. Haredi parties have more seats in the Knesset than does the once dominant Labor Party,” the left wing party that ruled the country for more than half of its history.⁴⁶ Entire neighborhoods and cities are made up of Haredim. The Ultra-Orthodox represent the Judaism that most Israelis do not believe in or do not themselves practice. While some secularists strongly oppose the Ultra-Orthodox, other secularists support them as representatives of historical Judaism. These secular Jews believe that they have a duty to continue such religious representation, even if that means that others are being observant in lieu of themselves.

The Ashkenazi Ultra-Orthodox never had a large scale immigration to Israel after the country was founded. Many early Ashkenazi Ultra-Orthodox already lived in pre-state Palestine or had recently emigrated from Europe post-Holocaust. While they were only a tiny minority at the founding of the country, they did gain control of major state functions including declaration of who is considered Jewish, a factor in granting Israeli citizenship. The Ultra-Orthodox also successfully pushed for religious standards across the country (e.g. putting mezuzot on doors, businesses closed on Shabbat), but they were frequently looked down upon and their real influence, in terms of lasting involvement in national

⁴⁵ Ibid 184.

⁴⁶ Gorenberg, Gershon. 2009. Letter from Jerusalem: Learning Curve. *Hadassah Magazine*, December 2009/January 2010. <http://www.hadassah.org> (accessed January 10, 2010).

decision making and politics, was not developed in the early years of the state.⁴⁷ Since 1948 though, the Ashkenazi Ultra-Orthodox population has “ballooned to almost half a million, largely due to their soaring birthrate and a renaissance of newly religious Jews”.⁴⁸ The demographic relevance of the Ultra-Orthodox population was further assisted by the Mizrahi immigration, increasing the diversity and quantity of Ultra-Orthodox Jews.

As the number of Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel increased, so too did the threat of increased discrimination against them. Many non-religious Israelis disagree with the way the Ultra-Orthodox live their lives and the way the Ultra-Orthodox often push their beliefs (religious, political, or otherwise) on others. Israelis are, on a whole, very proud of their country. As many Ultra-Orthodox were originally opposed to secular Zionism, secular Israelis view the religious as against the state and only involved in politics for their own benefit. They are not seen as proud Israelis. As the Haredim have gotten involved in Israeli politics and with a new definition of Zionism, 83.9% of the Haredim now feel “Israeli” and consider being Israeli a positive part of their identity. While this is below the 95% national average, the Haredim want to be reborn in Israel at a rate of 70.5% compared to 57.2% of anti-religious Israelis.⁴⁹ This demonstrates a commitment among the Ultra-Orthodox to living in and supporting Israel, even as many live in self-segregated communities.⁵⁰ Interestingly, as challenges to Israel’s legitimacy arise from those who fight against the state’s existence, Israeli responses are almost entirely based on the religious rationale promoted by the Ultra-Orthodox rather than any other justification that the non-religious Israeli majority may support.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Liebman, Charles S. *Religion, Democracy, and Society*. The Sherman Lecture Series. Ed. John Hinnels and Tudor Parfitt. Vol. 2. New York: Routledge, 1997. 77.

⁴⁸ Rosenthal 185.

⁴⁹ Sorek and Ceobanu 489.

⁵⁰ Ben-Rafael, Eliezer. The Faces of Religiosity in Israel: Cleavages or Continuum? *Israel Studies* 13, no. 3 (2008). (accessed September 21, 2009). 106.

⁵¹ Sorek and Ceobanu 491.

One of the primary tensions in Israel since it became a country in 1948 has been between religious and secular Jews. While this tension has primarily been verbal rather than physical in nature, “the plurality of Judaisms [in terms of Israeli practice] makes for a great deal of political disputatiousness about religion in Israel”.⁵² While disputes exist, the Ultra-Orthodox have maintained control over the aforementioned state policies and as their numbers and influence have grown, so too has their influence/control over additional state policies. As religious law becomes more integrated in state policies, the religious influence grows and benefits the expansion of the Ultra-Orthodox community whether through demographics or assisting in spreading the strictness of their segregated communities to Israeli society as a whole.

One of the most contentious issues between secular and religious Jews is military service. Israel has mandatory military service for all citizens, but some Ultra-Orthodox citizens are able to get exemptions from the draft, studying in yeshivas or doing some form of non-combat national service instead. In 2009, only 3.5% of Haredi males did military service. This low number furthers the aforementioned opinion that the Ultra-Orthodox are not committed to Israel. Additionally, the historical lack of military service contributes to economic problems in the religious community and contributes to the many Ultra-Orthodox who rely on national welfare for sustenance. With military discharge a common prerequisite for gainful employment, the Ultra-Orthodox have often had difficulty finding jobs. Recently, job training programs have been developed to address this problem. Even so, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) estimates that by 2019, deferral requests for religious reasons will almost double. Contrarily, religious military participation is on the rise with approximately 2,000 yeshiva students serving in the military or in comparable National Service roles in 2009 compared to only 300-400 in comparable roles in 2008. This dramatic increase is significantly larger than proportional demographic growth and may be indicative of Ultra-Orthodox involvement in Israeli society and a

⁵² Sharkansky 150.

reversal of the growing religiously motivated military deferment the IDF is concerned about.⁵³ With such developments, it is only a matter of time until such religious based disputes among Israeli Jews become a minor issue. Rather, it is likely that policy influence and political power will become the new fault lines for such intra-religion conflict.

From 1948 until 1967, the Israeli Left had almost complete control over the Israeli national government. During this time, the Ultra-Orthodox supported the ruling Labor Party. This gave them access to develop religious standards for the country. Then the 1967 Six Day War dramatically changed the landscape of Israeli politics. As a result of the war, Israel unified Jerusalem and gained control over the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula. Winning in 1967 gave the “Israeli Right a new lease on life, an opportunity to become a politically relevant and eventually dominant political power within Israel,” largely led by the expansion of existing religious political parties and the development of new religious parties (whose influence was further increased with the Mizrahi and Russian immigration).⁵⁴ After Israel gained new territory, the religious right was hungry to build and expand the Jewish presence in the new territory, much of which would become included in the idea of Greater Israel. The increase in land gave Israel the advantage of being able to leverage land for peace. While Menachem Begin, Israeli’s first true right-wing Prime Minister went against right wing principles in giving up the Sinai Peninsula in a peace treaty with Egypt, he made the concession in order to protect Israeli control over the West Bank and to insure the ability to maintain the rightist principle that there can only be “one sovereignty” in Israel (including the territories) and that such a sovereign would be Jewish.⁵⁵ With control over the land, the right worked against the establishment of a Palestinian national authority. The combination of these factors has led to increased left-right political fractionalization and to the increased political polarization of Israeli society.

⁵³ Wagner, Matthew. 2010. Sharp Rise in Haredi IDF Enlistment in 2009. *Jerusalem Post*, January 7, 2010. <http://www.jpost.com> (accessed January 10, 2010).

⁵⁴ Freedman 26.

⁵⁵ Ibid 28.

Identity politics has a particularly potent role for the Ultra-Orthodox, whose identity is defined primarily through religion. As such, when religious affiliation is strong and political interaction is encouraged, the Ultra-Orthodox can utilize religious idealism to effect political change. Ultra-Orthodox political support has grown. By utilizing the pull of rabbis as political forces in addition to being religious leaders, religious parties have successfully organized widespread political support in Ultra-Orthodox communities. Identity politics allows for gains in power “on the basis of collective identity”.⁵⁶ Some religious parties have utilized this community organizing advantage by framing themselves as actors not only “on behalf of a particular constituency but also in the name of religious tradition”.⁵⁷ The mixing of roles between religion and politics increases the role of religion in the state. Some claim that this mixture degrades the quality of democracy.⁵⁸ Rather, such a fusion of roles increases religious legitimization and involves more citizens in the government. Israel is primarily a secular society that is extremely modern in its development and entrepreneurial endeavors. This reality is the reason religious parties exist. The rising power of these religious parties can be based on the new authority of religious leaders and their desire to counter the effects of modernization on Ultra-Orthodox communities as well as maintain religious control over religious authority, as opposed to secular governmental oversight.⁵⁹ The direct methods of religious political parties, inspired by the belief that they speak on behalf of the divine authority, can be a source of tension, but has nevertheless aided the development of national policies that reflect Ultra-Orthodox ideals.

Israel has a long register of political parties. Among them are the religious right-wing parties of United Torah Judaism, the National Religious Party, Shas, and Meimad. While Israel’s religious population is only around 30% of the overall population, the country’s “list” system of government helps

⁵⁶ Yiftachel 239.

⁵⁷ Don-Yehiya, Eliezer. Religious Leaders in the Political Arena: The Case of Israel. *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 2 (Apr., 1984). 154.

⁵⁸ Yiftachel 95.

⁵⁹ Don-Yehiya 159.

minorities, such as the Ultra-Orthodox, have their voices heard by a greater audience. It grants parties of relatively small size a decent amount of bargaining power in the Knesset. While small, "Israel's religious population has a substantial influence in politics and the society at large because its structure provides the organization necessary to mobilize and maintain a strong political voice".⁶⁰

As the Ultra-Orthodox have found cause to become involved in Israeli national politics, they have become increasingly effective at organizing political support. Population growth has been a major impetus to the expansion of segregated Ultra-Orthodox communities. With community expansion, the need for greater economic support has grown. Many Ultra-Orthodox families are not economically self-sufficient due to a lack of secular education. While the occupational education programs previously described are becoming more popular, they have a long way to go before families are able to fully support families with an average of at least seven children. More than half of Ultra-Orthodox families live below the poverty line with lifestyles that force them to rely on public support and charity.⁶¹ This reality has given additional motive to increasing political influence beyond control of land and settlement expansion. The Ultra-Orthodox need the financial and infrastructure means to support their families. Direct political involvement in these areas goes against principles eschewed by the Ultra-Orthodox community in the early years of the state.

The Ultra-Orthodox political parties would not allow politicians to hold "full Ministerial office due to their principled objection to the idea of a secular Jewish state, confining themselves to vice-Ministerial positions, budgetary wrangling and shrill conflicts over religious observance".⁶² While this still exists to some extent, religious community representatives now hold major offices. The fact that they are specifically sought out for coalition membership gives the religious parties greater impact on

⁶⁰ Zarembski, Laura. Israel's Religious Right - Not a Monolith. Middle East Forum. <http://www.meforum.org> (accessed September 22, 2009).

⁶¹ Rosenthal 188.

⁶² Lehmann, David and Batia Siebzehner. Self-Exclusion as a Strategy of Inclusion: The Case of Shas. *Citizenship Studies* 12, no. 3 (06, 2008). 234.

government policies. The Ultra-Orthodox have benefited with increased child subsidies, allowing the large families to rely on government assistance to supplement their own earnings. Further, Ultra-Orthodox parties have secured an increase in the number of draft deferments granted (a historical win, even as some communities are now requesting these to a lesser extent) and expanded financial support for the religious education network. Israel has long granted religious groups their own educational systems as an alternative to the state system (that also includes some religious education). The reach of religious education institutions has increased. 1960 government statistics show that “6.6% of the children in Hebrew-speaking elementary schools were in Haredi institutions. By 2008, the proportion was 27 percent”.⁶³ This growth demonstrates both the demographic expansion of the Ultra-Orthodox community and the funding increases such religious institutions have received. Not all of the students in these schools are Ultra-Orthodox, giving the religious education system an opportunity to impact students of less observant backgrounds.

The focus of Ultra-Orthodox parties on socioeconomic issues has been a major contributor to their success. The “relative neutrality on questions of foreign policy and of security” of religious parties has allowed them to gain access to governing coalitions and high level positions without much controversy.⁶⁴ As religiously influenced parties begin to hold leading foreign policy positions (e.g. Avigdor Lieberman of Yisrael Beiteinu as Minister of Foreign Affairs), the less religious public is beginning to question some of the broader Ultra-Orthodox views. So far though, this has not translated into much, if any, loss of political support. Public questioning may decrease support for some controversial Ultra-Orthodox positions though. Some among the Israeli public do not support family subsidies from the government. When there were no religious parties in the ruling coalition during a short period in 2003 (coalitions shift on a regular basis), these subsidies were cut significantly.⁶⁵ This example demonstrates

⁶³ Gorenberg.

⁶⁴ Freedman 78.

⁶⁵ Gorenberg.

the necessity for the Ultra-Orthodox to be active participants in the government if they wish to benefit from the policies for which they advocate.

Religious parties have been a part of Israeli politics since the state was established. It has only been in the past two decades though that their power has actually had real generalizable significance. Religious parties have always affected the role of religion and state, but not until recently have they truly influenced Israeli national strategy. With the aforementioned changes and the involvement of Mizrahi (specifically Sephardi) immigrants and Russian immigrants in the establishment of new religious political parties, Ultra-Orthodox ideals have found widespread support and have been necessary to include in governing coalitions. Before the religious parties, Likud began moving the country to the right of the dominant Labor Party. Now, it is parties such as Shas and Yisrael Beiteinu that have gained power through winning significantly more Knesset seats. While it seems that Shas' growth has plateaued for the time being, their influence and ministerial portfolio continue to grow, showing increased influence beyond direct vote count.

Israeli Jewish values are shaped by religion and "for better or for worse instill a sense of loyalty and commitment to a larger collective".⁶⁶ As religious Jews accepted that being religious and being Zionist are not opposites, they moved into the political arena en masse. Combined, religious parties constituted 38 Knesset seats or approximately 32% of national government representation after February 2009 elections. Indeed Yisrael Beiteinu came in third place after Kadima and Likud, placing it ahead of the once dominant Labor Party.⁶⁷ United Torah Judaism has gained the support of Ultra-Orthodox families due to its focus on increasing subsidies for children.⁶⁸ Like all religious parties, the National Religious Party supports settlements. Nevertheless, it has led a group of other, smaller, religious parties that primarily supported the left wing Labor Party, perhaps because of its political

⁶⁶ Liebman 78.

⁶⁷ Hazan and Diskin 655.

⁶⁸ Freedman 93.

dominance. Now that Labor has lost major support, the National Religious Party has lost much of its influence in favor of more vocal right wing Ultra-Orthodox parties such as Yisrael Beiteinu and Shas.⁶⁹

Shas started out as a “party fighting local elections within the Ultra-Orthodox community” in the 1980s.⁷⁰ As the collective ideal came into place, Shas moved to the national arena. It was successful in establishing new Ultra-Orthodox schools and has utilized grassroots support to expand beyond the Ultra-Orthodox Sephardi arena. Their active local presence and early national successes have increased support for Shas among the religious and have made the party attractive to many non-religious Israelis, especially those coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. These secular Israelis find Shas’ ability to secure government funding for basic necessities attractive. The local grassroots presence is indicative of Shas’ social movement, beyond the purely political focus. While not unique, Shas has had significant success in bringing “secularized Jews ‘back’ to strict religious observance”.⁷¹ The Mizrahi attraction to religious parties has “strengthen[ed] Orthodox Jewry and continued the cardinal role of religion in the public domain”.⁷² Yisrael Beiteinu has built similar grassroots networks within the Russian community, successfully establishing its support among secular, even non-Jewish, Israelis.

The growing influence of ethnicity based religious parties is expanding to include the traditionally mainstream Ashkenazi European Israelis. Some of these parties have been influenced by a rise in government resistance among right-wing Jewish extremists. These individuals effectively make their voices heard. Their actions have worried some major politicians, including Efi Eytam, former head of the National Religious Party.⁷³ While the National Religious Party is not as rigid in its actions related to religious matters as the more strictly Ultra-Orthodox parties, it has a lot to lose to the growing voice of extremist elements that have begun to support Yisrael Beiteinu and Shas. Much of the extremism has

⁶⁹ Ibid 83.

⁷⁰ Lehmann and Siebzehner 238.

⁷¹ Ibid 239.

⁷² Smooha 11.

⁷³ Israeli Security Service, Religious Party Discuss Danger of Jewish Extremism. *Asia Africa Intelligence Wire*, August 5, 2004 (accessed October 1, 2009).

focused on the settlers living in the West Bank. While not all settlers are Ultra-Orthodox or are not living in the settlements for religious reasons, the few settlers that are living in the West Bank to hold on to the Greater Israel ideal through strong words, political action, and sometimes protests and violence, have had great success in having their cause heard. While many Israelis disagree with the actions of some of these settlers, it would be foolish to think that they have not pushed Israel further to the right. Because of the settlers' actions, Israel's willingness to dismantle settlements as a condition for Israeli-Palestinian peace is decreasing significantly.

Zionism has always preached the importance of control over land, but as of late that argument seems to have changed hands to the Ultra-Orthodox. Such arguments have engaged the identity politic basis of community organizing, supporting Ultra-Orthodox mobilization in support of policies that are aimed at achieving seemingly "nonmaterial gains".⁷⁴ While land itself is material, it is fulfillment of religious requirement that is the true goal of the Ultra-Orthodox. The divine truth argument that has given some Rabbis political authority has done the same for leaders of some settler movements.⁷⁵ It is no surprise then that Yigal Amir, the assassin of pro-peace Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, belonged to Kach, a settler movement against territory compromise led by an extremist rabbi. Nevertheless, while 56.7% of all Israelis believe that settlers would resist "evacuation of the settlements" by all means possible (including violence), only a small fraction of all Israelis, 16.6%, say that one should respond that way.⁷⁶ It is likely that even less would respond violently.

As perception reaches reality, the views of the settlers will become even more accepted. Indeed, the settlement issue has already begun to be framed differently. Strategic Affairs Minister Moshe Ya'alon has said that settlements do not need to be removed. If there are Arabs living in a

⁷⁴ Yiftachel 239.

⁷⁵ Liebman, Charles S. Extremism as a Religious Norm. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 1 (Mar., 1983).

⁷⁶ *Poll #31 - March 2010: Majority of Palestinians and Israelis Prefer Two-State Solution Over Binational State or Confederation* 2010. Jerusalem: The Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Jewish Israel, then there can be Jews living in a Muslim Palestine.⁷⁷ This reasoning has long existed, but has only recently become part of government discourse. While Washington continues to insist on a settlement freeze, such a reality is unlikely to occur during the current Israeli government. Binyamin Netanyahu's governing coalition relies on the support of the Ultra-Orthodox parties, support which he would lose by giving up settlement expansion.⁷⁸ Ironically, 57.7% of Israel non-settler Jews call a "national or religious mission to inhabit the land" the most important reason for current residents to settle in the territories compared to 48% of settlers.⁷⁹ If Ultra-Orthodox parties are able to utilize data like this to their advantage, they will continue to grow their support among less religious Israelis.

Many things have contributed to the rise in power of the Ultra-Orthodox. Through demographic growth and strategic alliances with ethnic groups, the Ultra-Orthodox have expanded beyond their stereotypical segregated communities. Zionism is no longer seen as evil by most of the Ultra-Orthodox and as such, the Ultra-Orthodox are now able to engage Israeli society as a whole, if only for self-benefit. As Rabbis are understood to be given divine authority, they have created the impetus for powerful political parties that utilize grassroots connections and local level organizing to build on the strengths of the Ultra-Orthodox community and translate those strengths to government control. This government control is now seen as essential for any Israeli national governing coalition. With charismatic leaders and successes that benefit people who, individually, may have little influence, the Ultra-Orthodox parties have gained the support of secular Israelis, convincing some of them to change their religious habits in addition to supporting the political party. It is true that some policies of the Ultra-Orthodox parties are more stringent than their counterparts and that some of their supporters have extremist views and actions that can make increased widespread support more difficult. Nevertheless, as the

⁷⁷ Keinon, Herb. No Need to Remove Any Settlements. *Jerusalem Post*, April 16, 2010. <http://www.jpost.com> (accessed April 16, 2010).

⁷⁸ Off the hook, for now. *The Economist*, September 24, 2009. <http://www.economist.com> (accessed November 5, 2009).

⁷⁹ Poll #31.

Ultra-Orthodox parties learn how to frame their arguments and effectively utilize comparisons to the general Israeli public, the power and influence of the Ultra-Orthodox political parties will only continue to increase.

Against the Trend: Israeli Arabs Not Gaining Power

Israeli Arabs fit the mold of a segmented and fractionalized community in Israel – yet they are not gaining power. Israeli Arabs make up approximately 20% of Israel’s population, a comparable demographic to the Russians.⁸⁰ They have been discriminated against since the founding of the State of Israel. The Arabs are recognized as a state ethnic minority and have their own educational systems, religious authorities, and political parties. Just as there are cities and neighborhoods consisting either entirely or to the greater extent of Mizrahim, Russians, and Ultra-Orthodox, there are Arab villages and Arab neighborhoods. Similarly, these homogenous communities often have lower socioeconomic status. Regardless of the similarities though, the story of Israeli Arabs is significantly more complex than any of the groups previously discussed. A concise description of the condition of Israeli Arabs is subsequently offered as a means of comparison to the groups that have found success in improving their interaction with and influence on Israeli society.

A multitude of reasons exist for the current status of the Arab residents of Israel. These reasons vary significantly based on one’s political views. An even approach is attempted in the following pages. Unlike the Mizrahim, Russians, and many of the Ultra-Orthodox, the Israeli Arabs did not end up in Israel as a result of immigration. Rather, they were in the land of Palestine before Israel was established. Arab citizens (Israeli Arabs legally have full citizenship) were not included in the programs of “cultural assimilation” that Jews from Muslim Arab countries received when immigrating to Israel. Coming from similar backgrounds, such an effort may have been beneficial, even though it would likely have been protested. Instead, Israel’s interactions with its Arab residents were based on trying to instill a sense of “loyalty” to the country.⁸¹ Israeli Arabs are often less educated, due to differences in curricula and government education subsidies, have less access to basic technological developments (e.g. Israeli Arabs

⁸⁰ Louer, Laurence. *To Be an Arab in Israel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. 1.

⁸¹ Ibid 11.

have less cars than Jewish Israelis), and have a lower life expectancy than Jewish Israelis.⁸² The complexity of interactions in the years leading up to 1948 and the subsequent years of state formation shaped the positioning of Arabs in Israeli society that is still in existence today.

Some scholars write of “five Arab demands that the Jewish majority reject: making Israel non-Jewish and non-Zionist, accepting Palestinian nationalism, lifting all restrictions on Arab individual rights, granting Arabs certain national collective rights, and incorporating Arabs into the national power structure”⁸³ while others describe a similar list, “the democratic character of the state, the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state, and security considerations” that guide Jewish-Arab relations in Israel⁸⁴. Israel does meet some of these “considerations” to a small extent, but it may be the fact that the Arab minority has demands, unlike other minorities, that contributes to their lack of societal inclusion. Either way, history has shown that the Arab minority in Israel is not able to organically gain influence and involvement with Jewish Israeli society, regardless of the specifics of integration processes.

According to opposition Labor Party Knesset Member Ophir Paz-Pines, “the Arab minority in Israel is structurally discriminated against and has been since the day the state was founded”.⁸⁵ This view is widespread in the Arab community and in some, mostly left leaning, Jewish communities. One of Israel’s primary policy concerns is security. Often, Israeli Arabs are viewed as a threat to national security. When Palestinian nationalism movements gain power, Israeli Arab freedoms tend to be restricted. Indeed, immediately following the establishment of Israel in 1948 and continuing until 1967, Arab areas of the state were placed under military control, limiting the freedoms Arabs are guaranteed

⁸² Chernichovsky, Dov and Jon Anson. The Jewish–Arab Divide in Life Expectancy in Israel. *Economics & Human Biology* 3, no. 1 (2005). 123.

⁸³ Smooha, Sammy. Minority Status in an Ethnic Democracy: The Status of the Arab Minority in Israel. *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 13, no. 3 (07, 1990). 389.

⁸⁴ Al-Haj, Majid. Multiculturalism in Deeply Divided Societies: The Israeli Case. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 26, (2002). <http://www.tapuz.co.il> (accessed September 21, 2009). 172.

⁸⁵ Friedman, Ron. Israel has Always Discriminated Against its Arabs. *Jerusalem Post*, October 24, 2009. <http://www.jpost.com> (accessed October 25, 2009).

as citizens.⁸⁶ While nothing at this level has continued, Arabs are sometimes viewed as a “hostile minority”, especially when Arab countries surrounding Israel increase their threats.⁸⁷ As was the case with the Ultra-Orthodox, it is rare for Arabs to serve in the Israeli military (with the exception of the Druze). Military service is a major consideration for equality under the law as citizens. While this should not lessen access in a democracy, it does for the Arabs.⁸⁸ Conscription is not mandatory for Arabs due to the fear of the “hostile minority” and many Arabs do not want to serve in the Israeli military and many Israeli Jews do not want them to serve. When Arabs do serve, they are often looked down upon in their communities.

Perhaps because of structural discrimination, “Israel’s Arab citizens are well aware of their economic dependence on the Jewish majority, both in the marketplace and by virtue of government economic transfers”.⁸⁹ When Arabs and Jews work together in community endeavors, they are often looked upon as the example, highlighted in cities such as Haifa and Akko. It may be the case that similar scenarios are increasing across the country. Nevertheless, there is often reliance by Arabs on their Jewish counterparts as discrimination may limit individual Arab success. It is worth noting that Arabs are compared to Jews even though Arabs include a multitude of religions such as Islam, Druze, and Christianity. Historically, there has been an assumption that looking Arab means you are Muslim. This was a cause for discrimination against the Mizrahim as well. It may be difficult for Arab citizens to find jobs in Jewish areas and regardless of location, Arabs regularly earn less than their Jewish counterparts. The unwillingness to cooperate with Arabs is often even more widespread in Ultra-Orthodox communities, perhaps because of land claims. At right-wing, religious Bar-Ilan University, a “policy of quotas enables only about 20 Arab students to live in the University dormitories”. The Jewish landlords

⁸⁶ Ghanem, As'ad. *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. 20.

⁸⁷ Al-Haj 173.

⁸⁸ Smooha 392.

⁸⁹ Freedman 132.

in the area would not rent to the Arab students and University administration eventually stepped in to rent on their behalf.⁹⁰

Israel's "aspiration is to have a Jewish and democratic state with full equality on the civil and social level".⁹¹ Israel is far from this reality. The Israeli government claims that it has no official religion even though the "Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty refers to a 'Jewish and democratic State'" and Israel's symbols, holidays, etc. are all based on Judaism.⁹² Equality may be unattainable when the country inherently favors one religion over another. Perhaps though, it is possible to come very close to equal. If Arab politicians are able to gain more of an influence in the Knesset, this could be a possibility. Jewish Israelis though worry about a demographic shift that may increase the Israeli Arab population from approximately 20% to 33% in the next twenty years.⁹³ They fear that increased governmental influence would change the makeup of Israel and that it would no longer be a Jewish state. As such, multiple measures have been put in place that can limit the success of Arab political ambitions.

Israeli Arabs have the right as citizens to vote for representation in the Knesset. In the early years of the state, few took advantage of Israeli politics to advance their cause. Those who did vote often supported communist parties or extreme left parties that were more likely to support Arab rights. While most suggestions for changes in the Arab-Israeli conflict involve structural changes, many Israeli Arabs are working within the Israeli system as opposed to trying to change it.⁹⁴ Indeed, "because of its contact with the Jewish-sector institutions, the Arab minority in Israel is developing as a political, democratic, and pluralistic community, with multiple political parties and movements and social streams".⁹⁵ Much of this dynamic is similar to the community building in Ultra-Orthodox communities

⁹⁰ Shahak, Israel, ed. *The Non-Jew in the Jewish State*. Jerusalem: 1975. 115.

⁹¹ Friedman.

⁹² Shetreet, Shimon. Freedom of Religion in Israel. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.mfa.gov.il/> (accessed September 21, 2009).

⁹³ Rosenthal 259.

⁹⁴ Freedman 131.

⁹⁵ Ghanem 6.

and political development of each of the Mizrahi, Russian, and Ultra-Orthodox demographics. This fragmentation also has negative effects. Israel has a threshold for actual Knesset representation wherein a list (political party) must get a minimum vote percentage to acquire a seat in the government. Currently, the threshold is 2% of the vote. Many political parties, including those of the Ultra-Orthodox and Arabs, have historically had difficulty getting enough votes. Most Ultra-Orthodox parties are now able to acquire enough votes. For the Arab parties, additional restrictions exist.

Predominantly Arab parties began to form in earnest with the rise of Palestinian nationalism in the 1980s. By 1989, there were four major predominantly Arab parties. Perhaps because of the increasing fragmentation, these parties were unable to secure Knesset seats. This led several parties to form the coalition party, United Arab List.⁹⁶ With the rising political movement in the 1980s, the Knesset amended the election law to “prevent from participation in Knesset elections any list that denies the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people, denies the democratic nature or the state, or incites to racism”.⁹⁷ These conditions are in direct contradiction to the tenants multiple Arab parties were formed upon. If that was the intention, then the amendment has been successful in disqualifying multiple Arab parties from election eligibility. Regardless of disqualification efforts, Arab election participation increased from 68.3% in 1992 to 77% in 1996, the largest increase in twenty years. Of those Arab voters though, only 69.8% voted for predominantly Arab parties while the rest supported the Labor Party.⁹⁸

The Arab parties have traditionally played the role of “permanent opposition”.⁹⁹ Individual Muslim leaders have had difficulty being accepted as teachers and religious authorities, being rejected by the Ministry of Religion.¹⁰⁰ A multitude of reasons may be given, but every time this occurs, it gives

⁹⁶ Freedman 116.

⁹⁷ Smooha 402.

⁹⁸ Freedman 118.

⁹⁹ Ghanem 165.

¹⁰⁰ Louer 184.

credence to theories of structural discrimination, a difficulty no other segmented and fractionalized community has had to deal with in this extreme. There has never been an Israeli Arab cabinet minister, regardless of “electoral clout”. When there have been Arab deputy ministers, they are usually relegated to smaller roles, often specific to the Arab population. Because the Arab parties are not Jewish, they may have increased difficulty in finding acceptance. Further, their non-Zionist or anti-Zionist stances create an aura of mistrust in the Knesset, especially when they are considered to have influence over Israeli domestic and foreign policies.¹⁰¹

Beyond the inter-Jewish discrimination that has plagued other segmented and fractionalized communities, there is extreme mistrust and general dislike between many Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs. This unfortunate reality shapes all other reasons the Israeli Arabs have not gained power or influence. It is the reason discrimination exists, informally or formally, at all levels of the state. A Hebrew University poll found that 76.6% of Israeli Arabs are worried or very worried that they may be harmed by Jews at any point in their everyday lives.¹⁰² While this percentage is extremely high, it should not be too surprising. In Israel’s early years, Jewish schools spent 1.4% of history education on curricula related to Arab history while Arab schools spent 20.2% of their history curricula on Jewish history.¹⁰³ Textbooks have now changed, but when today’s leaders barely learned about their neighbors in their formal education, one may understand how other, more biased, factors have shaped Israeli Jewish and Arab interactions. In March 2003, 60% of surveyed Israeli Jews supported some sort of incentive for Israeli Arabs to leave the country.¹⁰⁴ Not only do many Jewish Israelis feel uncomfortable with their Arab compatriots, but they do not even want Arabs in Israel.

The Mizrahi and Russian immigrants have become acculturated to Jewish Israeli society, facilitating their inclusion in the national dialogue. Studies show that Yediot Aharonot, Israel’s largest

¹⁰¹ Ghanem 165.

¹⁰² Poll #31.

¹⁰³ Al-Haj 175.

¹⁰⁴ Louer 3.

circulation newspaper has more Israeli Arab readers than any one Arabic-language newspaper.¹⁰⁵

Anecdotally, this suggests a similar desire among Israeli Arabs to participate in the larger Israeli society.

This desire has not been realized. Some Jewish Israelis cite Palestinian terrorists and their acceptance by some Israeli Arab leaders as reason for the lack of acceptance. Others believe that Arab Knesset members seek out publicity as opposed to working on substantive issues. Many find reason against acceptance in Israeli Arab government officials supporting actions that Jewish politicians denounce, including the refusal of Arab Knesset members to condemn Palestinian celebrations after the attacks of September 11.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Rosenthal 261.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid 287.

Affect on the Future

The rising influence of Mizrahi, Russian, and Ultra-Orthodox Israelis and the static position of Israeli Arabs are shaping Israel's future. It is impossible to make any sort of analysis or prediction about Israel's outlook and opportunities without including these factors. Solutions to the country's future problems require understanding the complexities of Israeli society. Israel is a young country. At 62 years, it has likely seen more wars, more large scale immigration/population changes, and more international emotional investment than any other country in as many years. Decisions made in the next few years will shape the development of the still young nation and may affect the makeup of the country, as well as whether it will still exist in another 62 years. Israel's future is defined primarily by the cohesiveness of the communities of which the country is comprised, its interactions with Palestinians and neighboring Arab countries, and the support of countries such as the United States. National policies focus on security and economic development. The political climate affects each of these concerns. While policies shift with every election, Israel has moved right of center and has become more conservative.

Israelis want change. Many are not very happy with the status of their country. 43.7% of Israelis say Israel's current condition is "so-so".¹⁰⁷ This comes as a result of discussions of a demographic "time bomb", a lack of progress towards peace with Palestinians and Arab neighbors, the threat of a nuclear Iran, and a breakdown in relations with the United States. On the positive side, Israel has never had more equitable relationships between its ethnic and religious population groups (at least the Jewish ones). While the country still has a long way to go, social improvements, communication, and understanding are key to widespread acceptance of policies and changes in the status quo vis-à-vis international agreements. In order to fully understand the pressing issues of Israel's near-term future, one must take into account the rising influence of the country's segmented and fractionalized

¹⁰⁷ Poll #31.

communities as well as those being left behind. The Mizrahim, Russians, Ultra-Orthodox, and Israeli Arabs are particularly important when considering the future of Israeli demographics, the Israeli economy, and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Demography

Israeli demographic predications have been a focus for the country since it was founded. Demography is the central Israeli tension between democracy and existing as a Jewish state. In generalizable terms, the ethnic group(s) to which the state's founders belonged "gained a dominant political, cultural, and economic status" during the country's formative years.¹⁰⁸ For Israel, this was Ashkenazi Jews. Subsequent immigration made the Mizrahim and Russians demographic threats to the establishment. As the Mizrahim and Russians have become more of a part of the country and its institutions, they have become associated with the dominant group. Palestinian Arabs, now Israeli Arabs, had lived on the land before it was Israel and with the creation of the new nation were relegated to inferior status. While they have not gained power and influence, the Israeli Arabs are viewed as a demographic threat. Together, the Israeli Arabs and Ultra-Orthodox have the highest birth rates in Israel and could dramatically alter the country's makeup, and according to some, affect its existence.

Israel, as a democratic state, is "more likely to be internally destabilized by differential demographic growth than authoritarian states". The nature of a democracy creates a problem for Israel if it wishes to remain a Jewish state. Further, the more Israel's "criteria for resource distribution are based on identity group membership, the more likely it is to be destabilized by differential demographic growth".¹⁰⁹ Israel distributes national government assistance to municipal and regional authorities based on a formula that can be said to favor Jewish communities over Arab communities. Israel also

¹⁰⁸ Fargues, Philippe. 2009. *CARIM Mediterranean Migration 2008-2009 Report*. Italy: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), European University Institute. 111.

¹⁰⁹ Toft, Monica Duffy. Differential Demographic Growth in Multinational States: Israel's Two-Front War. *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 1 (Fall 2002). 71.

distributes government subsidies and child benefits differently, depending on religion. As the Israeli Arab population rises, they are likely to use their increased demographics to force a change in their socioeconomic position.

Consensus on census numbers/population percentages by religious group and about the birthrate in each group is unavailable even after analysis of multiple statistics from different years with commentary by numerous scholars. One might assume that disarray in such vital information would limit its usefulness. Nevertheless, in October 2007 then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told of a coming “demographic battle, drowned in blood and tears,” referring specifically to Israel’s inclusion of populations of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in its census.¹¹⁰ If considered part of Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip must be counted, thus dramatically increasing the number of Israeli Arabs. Ultra-Orthodox Jews support incorporating these territories as recognized Israeli land. Doing so, would significantly decrease Israel’s percentage of Jewish citizens, thus threatening its ability to remain a Jewish state. Because of this reason, “Olmert said that the failure to negotiate a two state solution with the Palestinians would bring the end of the State of Israel”.¹¹¹

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, “since 2006 the Jewish population in Israel grew by only 1.5 percent annually... while the Arab population grew by 2.6 percent annually”. Of the 112 Israeli cities with 5,000 or more residents, 41 are Arab.¹¹² While most claim that the low Jewish growth is solely because of lower birth rate, other scholars additionally credit a decrease in Jewish immigration since the 1990s (Appendix 2 shows a history of Jewish immigration to Israel).¹¹³ Scholars generally agree that in order for Israel to be considered a Jewish state, its population must consist of a 70%¹¹⁴ to 75%¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Faitelson, Yakov. The Politics of Palestinian Demography. *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2009). 51.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ghanem 1.

¹¹³ Fargues 111.

¹¹⁴ Oren, Michael B. Seven Existential Threats: Iran and Terrorism are the Most Immediate, but Several Domestic Crises Also Pose a Mortal Danger to Israel's Future. *Commentary*, May 2009, 16 (accessed April 16, 2010).

¹¹⁵ Rebhun, Uzi and Gilad Malach. 2009. *Demographic trends in Israel*. Jerusalem: The Metzilah Center.

Jewish majority. While this may seem to counter the idea of a democracy, Israel's proportional system of representation gives minorities an unequal (higher) level of influence in the government, as has been demonstrated by the Russians, Mizrahim, and Ultra-Orthodox. Many worry that even a slight increase in the Israeli Arab population will threaten Israel as a Jewish state. While this Jewish majority threshold may not be entirely realistic, it seems to be the policy under which the greater part of (Jewish) Israeli society operates.

The demographic "problem" is extremely complex. Whereas some worry that Israel will not be Jewish enough, others are concerned that it may become too religious. While the overall Jewish birthrate is significantly lower than the Israeli Arab birthrate, the Ultra-Orthodox population is increasing four to five percent per year, with Ultra-Orthodox women having three children for each child a secular Israeli has.¹¹⁶ The Ultra-Orthodox population increased from 3% of Jewish Israelis to 9% in 2008 and is projected to reach 20.5% by 2028.¹¹⁷ Such a huge increase in the Ultra-Orthodox population will likely further move Israel's political stance towards becoming more conservative, a change with dramatic consequences on Israel's interactions with the Palestinians and with Arab neighbors. Further, it is possible that a large Ultra-Orthodox population will create numerical problems for the military since most of the Ultra-Orthodox still do not serve in the IDF.

Even with the increase in Ultra-Orthodox Jews, demographic data project that the Jewish population will decrease five percent in eighteen years.¹¹⁸ Additionally complex is how one should incorporate the results of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the census taking organization in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics is known for inflating the number of Palestinians in the territories. Numbers are key to support for nationhood (both for the Palestinians and the Israelis), changes in morale, and international aid. In May 2008, Palestinian Central

¹¹⁶ Toft 84.

¹¹⁷ Rebhun and Gilad 46.

¹¹⁸ Toft 85.

Bureau of Statistics President Luay Shabenah “claimed that the Arab population in Palestine would become equal to the Jewish population by 2016”.¹¹⁹ It is clear that this population change will not occur on the quoted time table, but this statement demonstrates the extreme political nature of demographics in Israel. Israel’s long term demographic goals may be stated as “preserving conditions that will allow the Jews to continue exercising their right to self-determination in Israel and assuring conditions under which Israel may continue to be a democratic, developed, and modern state that provides its inhabitants with a quality of life and welfare that is good and improving”.¹²⁰ If that is indeed the case, the Israeli government will need to make major changes in how it engages its Arab and Ultra-Orthodox populations and will likely need to take serious steps towards a two-state solution with Palestinians, before demographics make such an agreement unnecessary.

Economy

Israel is one of the most developed countries in the world. It is well known for its economic perseverance, even in challenging times, and it has strong technology and military economic establishments as well as a reputation for excellence in research and development. Indeed, the world’s second most important technology development center, Silicon Wadi, is located near Tel Aviv.¹²¹ Israel’s major industries and profit generating activities are people based. If the Ultra-Orthodox population increases at the levels some scholars are projecting, it is likely that more Israelis would need government assistance. Simultaneously, there would be less people involved in economic output and innovation, causing a major drain on national resources. Israel’s high tax rate might be increased further, thus decreasing business expansion incentives.

¹¹⁹ Faitelson 56.

¹²⁰ Rebhun and Gilad 49.

¹²¹ Land of milk and start-ups; Israel's technology cluster. *The Economist*, March 22, 2008, 74. <http://www.economist.com> (accessed April 16, 2010).

Concerns have been rising about the future of the Israeli economy. While political instability, terrorism, and large scale conflict have taken their toll, they have not “significantly impede[d] the operations of Israeli companies and the Israeli economy continues to grow at a healthy rate”.¹²² Rather, it has been the continued effects of the poor integration of immigrants as well as Israeli social programs that are the primary negative effects on economic activity. Most immigrants to Israel during the country’s early years were poor. As such, it became necessary for the government to be involved in providing for its citizens and publically operating many industries that were typically left to the private sector.¹²³ It has taken time for Israel to privatize many of its industries and while privatization has now occurred, the government has yet to effectively reform its public support system.

Israel’s government provides services such as child services, welfare, and other transfer services to its citizens. The distribution of these services has increased dramatically. Allocations vary depending on the political climate. With the Ultra-Orthodox being a major beneficiary and a new political power, it is unlikely that the budget will decrease. The cost has risen from 6.09% of GDP in 1985 to 8.8% in 2003, amounting to almost half of the annual national \$70 billion budget – and yet poverty has not decreased.¹²⁴ It is clear that these programs are either ineffective in dealing with the real root problem or that they are being implemented in an ineffective manner. For the Ultra-Orthodox, the government support may be contributing to their increased birthrates as families now receive more money to sustain families and study, as opposed to finding work.

High levels of inequality in Israel have become commonplace. Indeed, “Israel is second only to the United States in income inequality” among developed nations.¹²⁵ Israel’s inequality distribution is still weighted towards those groups that were affected by historical discrimination. Israel’s underclass is primarily composed of Mizrahi “multigenerational welfare families”. While most Russian immigrants

¹²² Gildea, Richard H. The Fading of Silicon Wadi. Forbes.com. <http://www.forbes.com> (accessed April 16, 2010).

¹²³ Sharkansky 41.

¹²⁴ Freedman 164.

¹²⁵ Sharkansky 46.

have achieved economic success, there are still significant numbers of the Mizrahim who have had difficulty in improving their economic position. Further, Ultra-Orthodox and Israeli Arabs families together constitute 67% of those below the poverty line. Low market participation by Ultra-Orthodox males (46% of Ultra-Orthodox males versus 83% for Israel as a whole and 92% for other advanced economies) and large numbers of children in families are the primary reasons behind this poverty rate.¹²⁶

It is clear that Israel's economy will be negatively affected if changes are not made to the current system. Whether or not demographic projections become a reality, Israel spends significant portions of its budget on social welfare programs that are not improving poverty rates (partially because of communal norms). As these populations do rise, the amount will have to increase while inequality gaps will widen simultaneously. This unsustainable economic activity could have disastrous implications for the entire country. Changes to the system must seek to involve more Israelis in Israel's economic successes and must begin at the earliest level. Currently, Ultra-Orthodox and Arab schools are not mandated to teach a "market-related curriculum".¹²⁷ Educating children about the market will increase their understanding of the economy and their political decisions, in addition to giving them another reason to join the labor force so that they may support their large families. This is especially true for students from the Ultra-Orthodox and Israeli Arab communities, whose workplace involvement is significantly lower than average and whose poverty levels are the highest in the country.

Peace Process

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict has been ongoing since Israel came into existence in 1948. Through war, terrorism, diplomatic channels, and international pressure, the conflict has been an inextricable part of the Israeli experience. Some believe that peace will happen quickly while others

¹²⁶ Freedman 169.

¹²⁷ Ibid 171.

think that a real, lasting peace is impossible. Whatever the case, the peace process is a major factor in Israeli governmental policy. According to one Israeli, “There’s no choice for us to live together or die together. We need real dialogue”.¹²⁸ Entire books and theses are written on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and offer predictions and options. Rather than exploring each of these ideas in detail, it is possible to offer one hypothesis based on the Mizrahi, Russian, and Ultra-Orthodox communities studied: either separate states need to be established soon for Israelis and Palestinians or it is likely that societal divisions will be exacerbated to the extent that they will prohibit Israeli society from functioning properly. These problems will be intensified with demographic changes.

The peace process is constantly a part of Israeli discourse, even serving as a basis for political party affiliation. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, of Kadima, said that Israel is “prepared to make a painful compromise, rife with risks, in order to realize peace”.¹²⁹ When current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of Likud, took office, he stated that Israel would be carrying out “ongoing negotiations for peace with the Palestinians in an attempt to reach a permanent agreement”.¹³⁰ Regardless of party affiliation, Israeli leaders have supported the peace process. The actions behind the words differ by party affiliation. Most Israelis support the peace process. Ironically though, 34.1% of Jewish Israelis do not think that a “political settlement” with Palestinians will ever be possible.¹³¹ Support for the peace process decreases as security tensions rise. When security concerns are more salient in Israeli society, support for right wing parties increases. Such was the case in the 2009 elections, when “many Israelis seemed to have been disappointed not only with the unfulfilled promises of the Oslo peace process, but also with the attempts of Sharon and Olmert to achieve a more peaceful

¹²⁸ Rosenthal 400.

¹²⁹ Crabtree, Steve. Highly Religious Israelis Least Supportive of Peace. Gallup, Inc. <http://www.gallup.com> (accessed April 17, 2010).

¹³⁰ Marcus, Jonathan. The 2009 Israeli Election: A Bump in the Road to Peace? *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2009). 65 (accessed December 23, 2009).

¹³¹ Poll #31.

environment by unilateral withdrawals".¹³² The right wing parties are less likely to make concessions, especially in terms of land. They would argue that withdrawal from the Gaza Strip under Sharon actually increased conflict.

The increase in support right wing parties receive benefits Ultra-Orthodox causes. Ultra-Orthodox Jews are only half as likely to support the peace process as less religious Israelis.¹³³ A leading cause for the lack of Ultra-Orthodox support is the trend of trading land for peace. As the Ultra-Orthodox claim all of Israel as the Jewish homeland, they are unwilling to give up land to the Palestinians. The right wing parties seek to retain land. In order for more Israeli leaders to guarantee the support of the Ultra-Orthodox, they would have to find a way to make peace without giving up land. This seems unlikely. It is also possible to leverage the support of less religious groups, perhaps including Israeli Arabs, to support political parties that consider land as a means to peace. If such a path is chosen, there would certainly be pushback from religious Jewish communities. If settlements are given up in the West Bank, 39.1% of Jewish Israelis support resisting the removal of settlements by legal means and 16.6% support resisting by any means necessary. For settlers (often Ultra-Orthodox, in the case of defending land), these percentages increase to 51.6% and 21.1%, respectively.¹³⁴ In such a scenario, it seems as though Israeli acceptance of a peace agreement would be unlikely and civil war could be an extreme consequence of large scale land for peace offers.

Leadership is a problem. Neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis have leadership that is able or willing to make necessary concessions in a peace process. Even if they could make the concessions, neither side's leadership would likely receive enough support for the agreement to be implemented. The Palestinians are divided between Hamas control in Gaza and Fatah control in the West Bank. The Palestinians have no unified negotiating power. Further, Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state has

¹³² Hazan and Diskin 657.

¹³³ Crabtree.

¹³⁴ Poll #31.

never been recognized by any Palestinian leader, a key condition for Israel's willingness to work with the Palestinians.¹³⁵ Just as Israeli Arabs seek recognition as an official minority, so too does Israel want to be recognized as a legitimate nation. Perhaps there is a mutually beneficial solution to this point of contention. For the Israelis, there is no leadership that has the capability to remove Israelis from the West Bank, assuming at least some land is part of peace negotiations.¹³⁶ Such an action would likely result in widespread rioting throughout Israel. Israeli leadership is further complicated by individuals gaining power, such as Avigdor Lieberman, who have strong anti-Arab views. Lieberman advocates for a loyalty pledge wherein all Israelis would have to pledge loyalty to Israel or forfeit citizenship. This policy would have the effect of stripping most Israeli Arabs of their citizenship.

Beyond land issues, it has become clear that many Jewish Israelis do not like or trust Israeli Arabs or Palestinians. Regardless of the reasoning, such interactions significantly decrease the enthusiasm of Jewish Israelis to engage Palestinians towards a successful peace agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Many Jewish Israelis view terrorism and the intifada as internal attacks from Arabs. When Israeli Arabs and Palestinians continue to protest and fight police, they are viewed as people who are more concerned with violence than peace.¹³⁷ Similarly, 70% of Israeli Arabs view Zionism as racist.¹³⁸ These are not conditions under which peace is possible. With land as the basis for peace negotiations, the Ultra-Orthodox have an invested interest in inciting Palestinians to violence. When Palestinians become violent, Israelis become more concerned about security than peace and again increase support for right wing parties. The cyclical cycle continues. While this may be the reality, it is not conducive to peace and actually worsens a security situation that it is supposed to resolve. If trust at some level is important, all schools need to change their textbooks to accurately teach about other Israeli communities, just as they had to change to incorporate the Mizrahi Jewish experience. This

¹³⁵ Oren.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Louer 201.

¹³⁸ Smooha 396.

approach will take time as another generation must mature before its affects will be felt. When education is coupled with a change from land for peace negotiations, a real solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict may be found.

Conclusion

Israel was established as a state in 1948. Since its founding, Israel has undergone major changes to its development and composition. The country is regularly challenged both internally and externally and considers security to be a major concern. Throughout a history of turmoil and triumph, Israel has struggled to be the welcoming place its founders had envisioned. As massive waves of Mizrahi and Russian immigrants entered Israel, they were placed into development towns and were not included as part of the national decision making system. Other citizens, including the Ultra-Orthodox and Israeli Arabs, who had lived in Palestine before it became Israel, were thought to be an impediment to the idea of the “new Jew” and were excluded from power structures. Often, they did not want to be involved in Israeli politics because they did not believe the country should exist. For those who were interested though, there was no opportunity for participation. Much of this would soon change.

With economic development, Israel’s population had more opportunities to advance its socioeconomic position. After Israel won the Six Day War in 1967, the Israeli geographic and political landscapes changed drastically. Due to these changes, the Mizrahim were able to escape their assumed economic dependence on the state and their exploitation in state building ended. Soon, the Mizrahim became included in Israeli society and they were no longer assumed to be inferior to the dominant Ashkenazi Jews. The 1990s brought another large-scale immigration to Israel. Over one million Russians entered Israel as an escape from Soviet oppression. This time, Israel was in a better position to integrate the new immigrants. The Russians did experience significant discrimination, but due to their high quality of human capital, many were welcomed into the dominant Israeli society much more quickly than the Mizrahim had been. Overlaps began to develop between the Mizrahim and the Russians. They have all become involved in national politics and their representative parties and leadership are now some of the most country’s influential.

Most of Israel is secular, yet its small Ultra-Orthodox population is now extremely loud, well organized, and politically active. The Ultra-Orthodox self-segregation has ended. Increased in size by religious Mizrahi and Russian immigrants, the Ultra-Orthodox have begun to engage Israeli society and move their political interests beyond solely self-serving causes (e.g. education, child subsidies, etc.) and into the realm of foreign policy. To many Ultra-Orthodox communities, land for peace politics are unacceptable. Working to keep Israel united has stimulated the Ultra-Orthodox to develop their conservative right-wing parties into major power houses that can decide elections and subsequently be indispensable partners in national coalition governments. They are now a powerful national constituency. While tensions certainly still exist between the Ultra-Orthodox, secular Israelis, and Israeli Arabs, the Ultra-Orthodox are more welcome now than at any other point in Israeli history.

At the same time as most major segmented and fractionalized communities are gaining power and influence at the national level, Israeli Arabs are not following the trend. While some Jewish Israelis would blame the Israeli Arabs for their own problems, it is likely the case that systemic discrimination continues to exist against Israeli Arabs at a level that the Mizrahim, Russians, and Ultra-Orthodox never faced. Even though most Israeli Arabs live comparatively well, they have not been able to penetrate society as a whole. Their political power and influence are particularly limited through policies aimed at Arab exclusion. Perhaps an end to terrorism and the anti-Zionist message will increase the Jewish Israeli openness to Israeli Arab involvement and calm the Jewish Israeli security fears.

Together, the Mizrahim, Russians, Ultra-Orthodox, and Israeli Arabs make up almost two thirds of Israeli society. If united, none of them would truly be a minority. Political disagreements and religious differences impede national cohesion. The continual rising influence of the Mizrahim, the Russians, and the Ultra-Orthodox is having a significant effect on the direction of Israel's future. The country will continue to become more conservative as it moves politically to the right. The position of

Israeli Arabs will only be worsened as this trend continues. Due to demographic changes, economic concerns, and the consideration of any potential peace process, this pattern is unsustainable.

The rising influence of historically segmented and fractionalized communities in Israel will continue. However, as demographics change, the power balance will be tilted towards the Ultra-Orthodox. Over time, Israeli Arabs will increase in population to the extent that they may be able to use their numbers as a means of guaranteeing expanded political power and influence, a new level of authority further increased by Israel's proportional representation system. Rather than accept this as an inevitable reality, the Israeli government is likely to make a number of changes that could range from a real peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict to an end to the Israeli democracy. The first option is the more likely choice. In order for peace to be achieved though, Israel will have to find a way to negotiate with the Palestinians without giving up all of the West Bank and Jerusalem. Otherwise, the Ultra-Orthodox will not endorse the peace plan. Any successful peace process will require considerable Ultra-Orthodox support. It is the historically segmented and fractionalized communities in Israel that now have control over the country's future.

Appendix 1: Israeli Jews by Country of Origin

Jews in Israel (Thousands), by country of origin (2).

Country of origin	Born abroad	Israel born	Total
Total	1.654,1	3.781,7	5.435,8
<i>Asia - total</i>	205,2	480,7	685,9
Turkey	26,4	51,2	77,6
Iraq	65,7	169,8	235,4
Yemen	30,3	109,2	139,6
Iran	47,8	87,2	135,0
India and Pakistan	17,3	28,2	45,5
Syria and Lebanon	11,0	24,5	35,6
Other	6,7	10,6	17,2
<i>Africa - total</i>	305,2	550,8	856,1
Morocco	151,9	337,0	488,9
Algeria and Tunisia	39,3	81,9	121,2
Libya	16,6	51,4	68,0
Egypt	18,9	37,4	56,3
Ethiopia	66,2	34,3	100,5
Other	12,3	8,8	21,2
<i>Europe, America and Oceania - total</i>	1.143,7	795,0	1.938,7
USSR (former)	696,8	227,9	924,7
Poland	54,2	148,5	202,8
Romania	95,8	120,7	216,5
Bulgaria and Greece	17,7	32,1	49,7
Germany and Austria	26,4	49,7	76,1
Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary	21,1	44,9	66,0
France	37,6	23,8	61,4
United Kingdom	20,3	18,3	38,6
Europe, other	29,0	31,4	60,4
North America and Oceania	84,9	58,2	143,1
Argentina	35,2	24,1	59,3
Latin America, other	24,7	15,4	40,1
<i>Israel born - father born in Israel</i>	-	1.955,2	1.955,2

(2) Continent/country of origin for persons born abroad - continent/country of birth; for persons born in Israel - father's continent/country of birth.

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (Israel), Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008

From: Fargues, Philippe. 2009. *CARIM Mediterranean Migration 2008-2009 Report*. Italy: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), European University Institute.

Appendix 2: Israeli Jews by Immigration Period

Jews and Others (1), by Origin, Continent of Birth & Period of Immigration (Thousands)

	8 XI 1948 (2)	22 V 1961 (2)	19 V 1972 (2)	4 VI 1983 (2)	31 XII 1995		31 XII 2007	
					Jews And others (1)	Thereof: Jews	Jews and others (1)	Thereof: Jews
Jews - Total	716,7	1932,4	2686,7	3350	4607,4	4522,3	5793,6	5478,2
Origin: Israel	..	106,9	225,8	533,9	1145,7	1143	2006,5	1998,4
Asia	..	818,3	655,9	740,2	730,6	728,9	687,8	683,6
Africa	..		617,9	736,1	838,6	835,5	871,1	857,4
Europe-America	..	1007,1	1187	1339,7	1892,5	1814,9	2228,2	1938,8
Israel born - total	253,7	730,4	1272,3	1927,9	2797	2790,2	3877,4	3831,8
Father born in: Israel	..	106,9	225,8	533,9	1145,7	1143	2006,5	1998,4
Asia	..	288,5	339,8	443,1	477,2	476,7	481,5	480,6
Africa	..		269,1	413,3	513,1	512,6	553,6	551,9
Europe-America	..	335	437,6	537,7	661,1	657,8	835,8	801
Born abroad - total	463	1201,9	1414,4	1422,1	1810,3	1732,1	1916,2	1646,3
Asia	57,8	300,1	316,1	297,3	253,4	252,2	206,3	203
Immigrated up to 1960	57,8	300,1	265,3	233,1	187,4	187,3	140,8	140,7
1961-1971	-		50,8	42,9	35,4	35,4	30,3	30,3
1972-1979	-	-		16	12,2	12	11	10,8
1980-1989	-	-	-	5,2	10,5	10,4	8,8	8,6
1990-2001							11,3	9,8
2002-2007							4,1	2,7
Africa	12,2	229,7	348,8	322,8	325,5	322,9	317,5	305,5
Immigrated up to 1960	12,2	229,7	204,4	181,7	153,2	153,1	120,5	120,5
1961-1971	-		144,4	121,7	102,6	102,6	87,8	87,7
1972-1979	-	-		13,2	10,2	10,1	9,1	9,1
1980-1989	-	-	-	6,3	23,6	23,3	21,5	21,3
1990-2001							52,6	50,6
2002-2007							25,9	16,3
Europe-America	393	672,1	749,6	802	1231,4	1157	1392,4	1137,8
Immigrated up to 1960	393	672,1	564,9	457,6	310,1	309,3	187,3	186,8
1961-1971	-		184,7	132,1	99,1	98,2	77	76,4
1972-1979	-	-		172,6	128,5	127	107,4	106,1
1980-1989	-	-	-	39,7	83,1	78,7	70,6	66,7
1990-2001							826,4	625,9
2002-2007							123,7	76

1. As of 1995 the population of "Jews and others" incl. Jews, non-Arab Christians and those not classified by religion, see Introduction.

2. Census dates.

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics (Israel), Statistical Abstract of Israel 2008

From: Fargues, Philippe. 2009. *CARIM Mediterranean Migration 2008-2009 Report*. Italy: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI), European University Institute.

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